Blót

Blót is the term for "sacrifice" in Norse paganism. A *blót* could be dedicated to any of the Norse gods, the spirits of the land, and to ancestors. The sacrifice involved aspects of a sacramental meal or feast.

The cognate term *blōt* or *geblōt* in Old English would have referred to comparable traditions in Anglo-Saxon paganism, and comparanda can also be reconstructed for the wider (prehistoric) Germanic Indo-European.

The Dísablót, by August Malmström

Contents

Etymology

Rites and beliefs

Dates

Locations

- Denmark
  - Lejre
- Norway
  - Mære
- Sweden
  - Gotland
  - Uppsala

Specific blóts

Modern reception

See also

Notes

References

External links

Etymology

The word *blót* is an Old Norse strong neuter noun (genitive *blóts*). The corresponding Old English neuter *blōt* (genitive *blōtes*) may be influenced by Old Norse; the Old English gospels have prefixed *ge-blōt* "sacrifice".

The reconstructed Proto-Germanic form of the noun is **blōtą* "sacrifice, worship". Connected to this is the Proto-Germanic strong verb **blōtaną* with descendants in Gothic □□□□□□ (*blōtan*), Old Norse *blóta*, Old English *blōtan* and Old High German *bluozan*, all of which mean "to sacrifice, offer, worship".

The word also appears in a compound attested in Old Norse as *blót-hús* "house of worship" and in Old High German as *bluoz-hūz* "temple". With a different nominative affix, the same stem is found in the Proto-Germanic noun **blōstrą* "sacrifice" — attested in Gothic **□□□□□□* (**blostr*) in □□□-□□□□□□□□□ (*guþ-blostreis*) "worshipper of God" and Old High German *bluostar* "offering, sacrifice"). This stem is thought to be connected to the Proto-Germanic verb **blōaną* "to blow; to bloom, blossom", as are the words for "blood" (Proto-Germanic **blōþą*) and "bloom" (Proto-Germanic **blōmô*). Sophus Bugge was the first to suggest a connection between *blót* and the Latin *flamen* (< **flădmen*), and both words can be traced back to the Proto-Indo-European stem *bhlād- "to bubble forth; to mumble, murmur, blather".[1]

Rites and beliefs

The verb *blóta* meant "to worship with sacrifice",[2] or "to strengthen"![3] The sacrifice usually consisted of animals or war prisoners, in particular pigs and horses. The meat was boiled in large cooking pits with heated stones, either indoors or outdoors. The blood was considered to contain special powers and it was sprinkled on the statues of the gods, on the walls and on the participants themselves.

It was a sacred moment when the people gathered around the steaming cauldrons to have a meal together with the gods or the Elves. The drink that was passed around was blessed and sacred as well and it was passed from participant to participant. The drink was usually beer or mead but among the nobility it could be imported wine.

The old prayer was *til árs ok friðar*, "for a good year and frith (peace)" They asked for fertility, good health, a good life and peace and harmony between the people and the powers.

Dates

The autumn blót was performed in the middle of October (about four weeks after the autumn equinox), the Winter Nights, indicating the beginning of winter. The great midwinter blót, or Yule, took place in the middle of January.[4] Freyr was the most important god at the Midwinter and autumn blót, and Christmas ham (the pig was for Freyr) is still a main Christmas course in parts of Scandinavia. The Summer blót was undertaken in the middle of April (about four weeks after the spring equinox) and it was given to Odin.[5] Then, they drank for victory in war and this blót was the starting date for Viking expeditions and wars.

For the early Anglo-Saxons, November was known as *Blōtmōnaþ*, as this later Old English passage points out:

> *Se mónaþ is nemned on Léden Novembris, and on úre geþeóde blótmónaþ, forðon úre yldran, ðá hý hǽðene wǽron, on ðam mónþe hý bleóton á, ðæt is, ðæt hý betǽhton and benémdon hyra deófolgyldum ða neát ða ðe hý woldon syllan.*
>
> The month is named in Latin *Novembris*, and in our speech *blót-month*, because our forefathers, when they were heathens, always blóted in this month, that is, that they took and devoted to their idols the cattle which they wished to offer.

Locations

A building where the blót took place was called a *hov* (compare German *Hof*) and there are many place names derived from this in e.g. Scania, West Götaland and East Götaland. Excavations at the medieval churches of Mære in Trøndelag and at Old Uppsala provide the few exceptions where church sites are associated with earlier churches.

There were also other sacred places called *Hörgr*, *Vé*, *Lund* and *Haug*. *Hörgr* means altar possibly consisting of a heap of stones, *Lund* means "grove" and *Ve* simply "sacred place". The Christian laws forbade worshipping at the *haug* or *haugr* meaning "mound" or "barrow".[6]

Denmark

Lejre

The German historian Thietmar, Count of Merseburg wrote that the Daner had their main cult centre on Zealand at Lejre, where they gathered every nine years and sacrificed 99 people but also horses, dogs and hens. There are however no historical records from Scandinavian sources nor any archeological findings supporting this. Archaeological excavations have indeed revealed Lejre to be of great importance and in fact the seat of the royal family dating to at least the Iron Age. There is not conclusive evidence that Lejre was the site of a main cult centre though, but excavations around lake Tissø not far to the West, have revealed an ancient hof of great importance.

Norway

Mære

Snorri Sturluson relates of a meeting between the peasants of Trøndelag and king Haakon I of Norway, a meeting which ended in a religious feud centered around the blót. Haakon was raised at the Christian English court and had returned to claim the throne of his father Harald Fairhair (the unifier of Norway) and intended to Christianize the country. In spite of the fact that the peasants had elected Haakon king at theThing they opposed his religious ideas.

> It was an old custom, that when there was to be sacrifice all the *bóndi*s [freeholders] should come to the spot where the temple stood and bring with them all that they required while the festival of the sacrifice lasted. To this festival all the men brought ale with them; and all kinds of cattle, as well as horses, were slaughtered, and all the blood that came from them was called *hlaut*, and the vessels in which it was collected were called *hlaut*-vessels. *Hlaut*-staves were made, like sprinkling brushes, with which the whole of the altars and the temple walls, both outside and inside, were sprinkled over, and also the people were sprinkled with the blood; but the flesh was boiled into savoury meat for those present. The fire was in the middle of the floor of the temple, and over it hung the kettles, and the full goblets were handed across the fire; and he who made the feast, and was a chief, blessed the full goblets, and all the meat of the sacrifice. And first Odin's goblet was emptied for victory and power to his king; thereafter, Niord's and Freyja's goblets for peace and a good season. Then it was the custom of many to empty the brage-goblet (1); and then the guests emptied a goblet to the memory of departed friends, called the remembrance goblet.
>
> — Hákon the Good's Saga, section 16, Sacred Texts website.

During this ceremony, the king also had to participate, although he was a Christian, and he had to drink of the mead that was offered and consecrated for Odin, Njord and Freyja. The peasants also wanted him to eat of the meat, but he only gaped over the handle of the cauldron and held a linen cloth between his mouth and the meat. The peasants were not at all satisfied with a king who would not participate fully in the blót. The King had however, been seriously humiliated and later he converted to the old faith. The tradition says that he was buried in the old ways.

Sweden

Gotland

The Gutasaga relates of the blót on the island ofGotland in the Baltic Sea:

Firi þan tima oc lengi eptir siþan. Troþu menn a hult. oc a hauga. wi. oc. stafgarþa. oc a haiþin guþ. blotaþu þair synnum oc dydrum sinum Oc fileþi. miþ matj oc mundgati. þet gierþu þair eptir wantro sinnj. land alt. hafþi sir hoystu blotan miþ fulki. ellar hafþi huer þriþiungr. sir. En smeri þing hafþu mindri blotan meþ fileþi. matj. Oc mungati. sum haita suþnautar. þi et þair suþu allir saman.

Before this time, and a long time thereafter, they believed in groves and barrows, sanctuaries, and sacred enclosures and in the pagan gods. This they did due to their superstition. The whole country (the althing) had the largest blót with sacrifice of people, otherwise every trithing had its blót and smaller things had smaller blót with cattle, food and drinks. They were called food-, or cooking-brethren, because they prepared the meals together

Uppsala

The German chronicler Adam of Bremen has described how it was done at the Temple at Uppsala at Old Uppsala in Sweden, ca 1070:

> Thor was the most powerful god and ruled over thunder and lightning, wind and rain, sunshine and crops. He sat in the centre with a hammer (Mjolnir) in his hand, and on each side were Odin, the god of war, in full armour and Frey, the god of peace and love, attributed with an enormous erect phallus. All the pagan gods have their priests who offer them the people's sacrifices. If there is disease or famine, they sacrifice to Thor, if war to Odin and if weddings to Frey.

> Every ninth year there is a blót of nine days, a common feast for everyone in Sweden. Then they sacrifice nine males of each species, even men, and the bodies are hung from the branches of a grove near the temple. No one is exempt from this blót and everyone sends gifts to the shrine, even the kings. Those who are Christian have to pay a fee not to take part in the blót.

Adam of Bremen considered this financial penalty to be very harsh.

It is possible that the last nine-day blót was performed in 1078. The Temple at Uppsala was probably destroyed by king Ingold I in 1087. For quite some time there had been civil war between Christians and pagans every nine years, and this was the year of the last battle.

According to Snorri, there was a main blót at the Temple at Uppsala in February, the *Dísablót*, during which they sacrificed for peace and for the victories of the king. The blót was also performed to see how large the next harvest would be. Then the Thing of all Swedes was held and there was a grand fair, the Disting. The Disting survived Christianity, and the tradition has never been interrupted. The fair is still held every first Tuesday in February in Uppsala, even though the date has sometimes been moved within the month. In 1968, the tradition of discussing official matters was resumed.

A depiction of a Goði leading the people in sacrificing to an idol of Thor in this painting by J. L. Lund.

Specific blóts

The old Norse calendar consisted of a summer half year and a winter half year, not the four seasons modern Europeans are accustomed to. The winter half of the year began in mid-to-late October, the summer half of the year began in mid-to-late April. Some blót were associated with these turning points.

Beginning of Winter half year

- Winter Nights,
- *Haust blót* "autumn sacrifice", mentioned in the Ynglinga saga and in other texts
- *Völsi blót*. The *Völsi* was the penis of a stallion, and the rites surrounding it are described in *Völsa þáttr*. It was taken from a stallion during the autumn butchering, and it is said that the mistress of the homestead considered it to be her god, and kept it in a coffin together with linen and leeks (see also horse sacrifice). In the evening everybody gathered in the main building. The mistress presented the penis from the coffin, greeted it with a prayer, and let it pass from person to person. Everybody greeted it with the religious phrase *May Mörnir receive the holy sacrifice!*.[7]
  - The *álfablót* or *Elven blót* was small scale and was celebrated at the homestead and led by its mistress. Not much is known about these rites, since they were surrounded by secrecy and strangers were not welcome during the time of the rituals. However, since the elves were collective powers closely connected with the ancestors some assume that it had to do with the ancestor cult and the life force of the family
  - Dísablót

During winter

- Yule, an important sacrifice celebrated some time after Winter solstice. When Christianity arrived in Scandinavia the yuleblót/winterblót was celebrated on 12 January (note: Date as of the previous Julian calendar. Hence it is not on

January 12 in the current calendar)

At the midpoint of the Winter half of the year

- Þorrablót (Iceland)
- Freyr blot (Sweden): The *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* has an account of a priestess of Freyr travelling across eastern Sweden (Uppland or Södermanland) with an image of the god in wintertime, celebrating a sacrifice for fertility.

Beginning of Summer half year

This point in time is known as First Day of Summer in modern Iceland

- Dísablót
- *Sigrblót*: the Ynglinga saga states one of the great festivals of the calendar is *at sumri, þat var sigrblót* "in summer, for victory".

Modern reception

Pre-Christian Scandinavian traditions have left traces in Scandinavian folklore. A conscious revival of Norse paganism has also taken place, in the 19th century in Romantic nationalism, and since the later 20th century under the name Asatru or Germanic Neopaganism.

In Scandinavian Yule or Christmas traditions in particular, such as the *Christmas porridge*, of which an extra bowl often is served and carried outdoors, because this is a meal shared with the guardian of the homestead, the *tomte* (*nisse* in Danish and Norwegian, *tonttu* in Finnish), a land wight.

The Þorrablót is an Icelandic tradition introduced in the 19th century, deliberately harking back to the term *blót* associated with pre-Christian times.

Modern adherents of the reconstructionist Germanic neopaganism (in English-speaking countries also known as "heathenism") have developed traditions of *blót* rituals celebrated in a contemporary context since the 1970s.

See also

- Germanic neopaganism
- Hearg
- Housel
- Lác
- Laukaz
- Weoh
- Żertwa

Notes

1. Bammesberger (1990:87); Orel (2003:50–51).
2. blœt; blét, blétum; blótinn, with acc. of that which is worshipped, with dat. of the object sacrificed; Zoëga, A. *Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*
3. Steinsland & Meulengracht 1998:74
4. Sturluson, Snorri (1964). *Heimskringla*. Translated by Hollander, Lee M. (illustrated, reprint ed.). University of Texas Press. p. 106. ISBN 0292730616.
5. "A time for Blot" (https://web.archive.org/web/20120520031241/http://www.fornsidr.no/2012/03/a-time-for-blot-2/) *Reviving the Elder Way*. Archived from the original (http://www.fornsidr.no/2012/03/a-time-for-blot-2/) on 2012-05-20. Retrieved 2012-08-12.

6. *Old Norse Online Base Form Dictionary* (Jonathan Slocum and Todd B. Krause. The College of Liberal Arts. University of Texas at Austin) (http://www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/lrc/eieol/norol-BF-X.html)
7. *Mörnir* probably means female Jotuns, because in *Haustlöng* *faðir mörna* is used as a kenning for Jotun.

References

- Bammesberger, Alfred (1990). *Die Morphologie der urgermanischen Nomens*. Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsverlag. ISBN 3-533-04230-8.
- Näsström, Britt-Mari (Oslo 2001). *Blot: Tro og offer i det førkristne Norden*. ISBN 82-530-2146-1.
- Orel, Vladimir (2003). *A Handbook of Germanic Etymology*. Leiden: Brill. ISBN 90-04-12875-1.
- Steinsland, G.; Meulengracht Sørensen, P. (1998). *Människor och makter i vikingarnas värld*. ISBN 91-7324-591-7.

External links

- a-time-for-blot-
- Knowst How to Blot
- Definition of Blót – Zöega dict.
- Blót explained according to Heithni

Retrieved from 'https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Blót&oldid=877820606'

This page was last edited on 11 January 2019, at 03:08 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.